Works Cited: Adapting Undergraduate Writing Center Experience to Writing Center Scholarship

An Honors Thesis (Honors 499)

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Abstract

Writing centers exist in a variety of institutional contexts, being housed in high schools, community colleges, universities, and other spaces across the globe. Because of the diversity in context, clientele, and staff, writing centers are perfectly situated as objects of research. Oftentimes, though, this research is rooted in what Stephen North identifies as lore, or anecdotal evidence that does not utilize grounded, empirical research. Furthermore, as this lore is translated into best practices to enact in the center, "conclusions are drawn about peer tutors, information is produced for peer tutors, but rarely are these things created by peer tutors. Tutors are often objectified and essentialized in the literature devoted to them. In this way, tutors are disallowed a voice in the literature that pertains most directly to them" (Boquet 18). This thesis, then, aims to bring methods of empirical, grounded research into the realm of writing center research, specifically for undergraduate peer tutors. Through an examination of the salient literature of the field, interviews with writing center professionals, and an inclusion of potential research questions and methods, readers of this document will gain an understanding of the overarching trends in writing center research and the methods conducive to producing data-driven, valuable publications.

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Process Analysis Statement

This thesis was born out of a natural progression of ideas. Initially, I began my research process as a history of our writing center, doing a literature review that reflected the trends and current scholarship in the field and applying them to the tenets and goals of our center. As I conceptualized this project, though, I was left with a question: Who exactly is this benefitting? This question became the exigence for my new project, one that is very similar to the one I proposed at the beginning of the semester, but different in several integral ways.

Taking the literature I reviewed, I felt that my project would better serve the writing center community as a research guide. Having familiarized myself with the salient conversations in the field and having presented at several regional and national writing center conferences over the course of the last two years, I felt comfortable enough assuming the ethos of someone who could recommend pertinent topics of research and share methods of inquiry.

Thus, a new thesis was born. "Works Cited: Adapting Undergraduate Writing Center Experience to Writing Center Scholarship" is a product of my own experience as an undergraduate researcher in the center. Having been hired on after taking a course that surveyed salient writing center scholarship, I was already in a position to begin my own inquiry into the field; however, many of my coworkers had not been given that exposure to writing center work outside of the one-to-one peer tutoring model and, as a result, were not as interested in pursuing various research questions or attending conferences when given the opportunity. Perhaps they didn't feel their voice was warranted there.

Seeing this need, and also agreeing with Elizabeth Boquet's assertion in my abstract and paper that tutors are too often essentialized in the literature and barred access to its creation, I wanted to open the doors to my peers so they could begin this level of questioning.

Therefore, while my topic has shifted from my initial proposal, many of my identified methods remain the same. First, this thesis is grounded in a content analysis of the literature, conferences, and other research the field produces. "Works Cited" gave me the opportunity to code trends in writing center research and synthesize these conversations for my readers. Not only did this process give me more experience in these methods of research, but it allowed me to survey more of the research in the field that I had wanted to read, but had not yet done.

In addition, I was also able to conduct several interviews. While I was no longer collecting an oral history of the center, I was able to use this qualitative method to ground my assertions with professionals in the field who interrogate in the topics I had identified and coded in my content analysis. My experience with these interviews was enlightening. I got to create the questions, record the conversations, transcribe them, and code the results in order to discover what information they had discussed, and the ways in which this information aligned or differed with my findings in my content analysis.

Finally, this thesis was also invaluable in that it exposed me to more methods of grounded research. Framing these research questions and scenarios through varied methods of inquiry was not only something that I anticipate will be helpful for my readers, but also helped me as I consider further areas of research for graduate school.

As I conducted this research, I did run into several challenges. First, IRB gave varying reports about whether or not I would need to submit a proposal. Ultimately, halfway through the project, it was advised that I should submit one, just in case. While I did have experience with IRB already, and therefore did not have problems formatting the proposal, I knew that responses from the board could take time. Luckily, I received a decision in a matter of days, deeming my project Not-HSR, allowing me to proceed.

While perhaps not a challenge, this thesis has limitations in the sense that all of my interviews were conducted with Ball State administrators. Although my participants hold different administrative titles and pursue varied avenues of writing center research, I would have preferred to have cross-institutional participants.

As I consider the meaning of this project, I think back to my own undergraduate experience in the writing center. I am extremely lucky because I was able to present my research at several esteemed writing center conferences as an undergraduate student. I've found writing centers to be a fascinating topic of study due to the nature of their institutional positioning (that is, precarious), diversity of clientele and staff, intersection with the exploration of identity through writing, and their actualization of the writing process—often across genres and modes. I've also found writing center scholars particularly welcoming to undergraduate researchers. While occasional conference-goers tend to minimize our experiences and findings ("They're only an undergraduate," "What a great presentation for an undergrad," etc.), most treat our research like any other scholar's. Due to my positive experience, I want to help other tutors hone their academic voice and ensure that the research and best practices that are produced for us to enact are truly representative of our involvement in the tutoring process and feasible.

This project is the culmination of a lot of internal metacommentary on my own experience as an undergraduate researcher and tutor, hundreds of pages of research and theory, interviews, coding, and more. I've learned invaluable lessons that will help me in future research projects, discovered the need to expand the scope of my research in the future, and blend various research methods together in meaningful ways. I'm grateful for this project, and I hope it can make an impact as I send it to the Bracken Library archives and condense it for the Writing Center at Ball State's handbook.

Introduction

How were you introduced to the writing center? Did a beloved professor who commended your writing suggest you apply for a tutor position? Were you a client intrigued by the process of closely analyzing your own work collaboratively? Maybe you took a course about writing centers, spent a semester learning their practices and decided to join the staff; or, were forced to join the staff as a stipulation of your assistantship. Regardless, one thing is certain: those who maintain our centers are those who learned to love them, those who chose to stay. What was it about their experience as tutors that encouraged them to dedicate their lives to these spaces?

I remember the first day I conducted a one-on-one at my center. The training wheels were off and I was no longer team tutoring. Wearing imposter syndrome accessorized with the pressure of oh-God-what-if-can't-help-them, I walked out to the small table where my client sat, computer propped open, coffee thermos handy.

"Hi, my name's Noah. I'm going to be your tutor today. Have you ever been to the writing center before?"

I'm sure the session was fraught with overlooked comments, nervous pauses, and an improper focus on higher- and lower-order concerns. But, I survived. And as I continued to survive session-after-session, as I found my stride, I began to wonder what went on with writing centers beyond the sessions I was having. Through this exploration of what else occurred behind the scenes, I too became one of those people who love writing centers—one of those people who wanted to stay.

In my two years as an undergraduate tutor at the Writing Center at Ball State University, I was introduced to invaluable research opportunities and resources that made those opportunities possible: I've presented at the International Writing Centers Association, East Central Writing Center Association, Ball State's Undergraduate English Studies conference, and am drafting an

article for publication with one of my professors. I was lucky to have a writing center that was able to give me the tools and platforms available to delve into this field's scholarship. And, because of the nature of this community, I'm sure many of you are lucky enough to be in Centers like mine, too.

But, finding your way to these resources, understanding the history of our field, and becoming attuned to its current conversations does not come easily, and certainly is not understood overnight. No, writing center scholarship is saturated in debates about "best practices," theories regarding space and identity, and even fights to simply justify our existence.

Therefore, much like we need a *Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* in order to introduce us to commonly accepted forms of one-to-one writing consultation, new tutors need a guide to involving ourselves in the research of writing centers. Elizabeth Boquet writes in her article, "Intellectual Tug-of-War: Snapshots of Life in the Center," about the lack of voice tutors have in their own roles. She states:

> Part of the problem seems to be that, with few notable exceptions (*The Writing Lab Newsletter* and the National Conference on Peer Tutoring and Writing being the most obvious), conclusions are drawn about peer tutors, information is produced for peer tutors, but rarely are these things created by peer tutors. Tutors are often objectified and essentialized in the literature devoted to them. In this way, tutors are disallowed a voice in the literature that pertains most directly to them. Even though many tutors have several semesters of training in composition theory and several years of experience tutoring, they cannot, almost by definition, be considered professionals. A peer is not a professional; a tutor is not a teacher. (18)

Recognizing this problem, I want to give tutors the power to begin asking pertinent research questions, interrogate the practices they perform in sessions, participate in scholarly discussions

about the work they do every day, and expand this position to something more than just a part time job; instead, I want tutors to understand writing centers are backed by a community of academics and a rich body of work that spans decades. The perspective of a tutor is just as important as the perspective of a director; we are the ones working with the clients directly, testing out the theories and practices those with PhDs prescribe to us.

In this text, I have compiled a series of topics and resources integral to the writing center research I have come to participate in. I learned about these resources and texts over the course of two years, primarily from the faculty and graduate students that I worked alongside. I am grateful for their guidance, and now I want to share what I have learned with tutors who are also interested in learning more about writing centers, their scholarship, their history, and their trajectory.

Literature Review

Writing centers have been richly theorized, and with this theorization, a myriad of "best practices" have made their way into the toolboxes of tutors across the globe. As this scholarship continues to be produced, certain themes, issues, and master narratives have become prominent in the field—and oftentimes, points of contention. After conducting interviews with several writing center professionals, attending writing center conferences, and coding the recent literature the field has produced, I have identified several topics—topics particularly attuned to the work of tutors—in relation to field-wide concern. These topics are:

The overarching narratives of the center and their impact on labor

The naming and purpose of the center, and the ways this signals a shift towards multiliteracy.

Identity and the center, particularly as it intersects with tutor and client identity

The "best practices" that may be enacted in the center as a result of this inquiry.

After isolating these topics, I began to familiarize myself with prominent scholarship struggling with these issues.

In Jackie Grutsch McKinney's 2013 book, *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers*, the current overarching narrative of the writing center—"writing centers are comfortable, iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-to-one tutoring on their writing"—is deconstructed (3, emphasis original). McKinney groups this narrative under three umbrella assumptions: "Writing Centers are Cozy Homes;" "Writing Centers are Iconoclastic;" and "Writing Centers Tutor (All Students)." This narrative, while allowing writing center scholars to "discern outsiders by those who stray from the narrative," deserves critical examination (McKinney 4). McKinney argues this is because "The effect of the writing center narrative can be a sort of collective tunnel vision" that "has focused our attention so narrowly that we already no longer see the range and variety of activities that make up writing center work" (4-5). The implications of each umbrella issue similarly disrupt writing center work through the perpetuation of: counterproductive or untrue narratives; or, markers of writing center culture and identity that ultimately become distractions rather than substantive portrayals.

In "Writing Centers are Cozy Homes," McKinney troubles the identity of the center as a home, stating, "Home life may be abusive or dangerous" or "just might not be a good place to get work done" (25-26). Similarly, the ways in which writing centers are constructed as homes often imitate white, middle class assumptions of home rather than a diverse construct of the home, marginalizing populations who do not identify with that background (McKinney 25-26). McKinney also notes that marking writing centers as "cozy homes" has direct gender implications: "Fact is, if the writing center is home and staff is family, that makes the director the mother" (26). Therefore, as we become focused on the construction of the ideal "homey" writing center—one that includes "round tables, art, plants, a window to stare out, bookshelves, coffee pot, decent chairs, couches"—we forget the true focus of the center: the composition (Gardner, qtd. in McKinney 21). That said, portraying the center as cozy—a misleading narrative that attempts to hide the discomfort a student will likely feel as their work is critiqued—limits what a center can be and forces staff to "see

particular items and to ignore others" (McKinney 34).

Throughout the second portion of the text, "Writing Centers are Iconoclastic," the narrative of centers as "alternative, insolent, rebellious, different, non-traditional, (not) marginal" and "[rejecting] the dominant pedagogies and relationships encouraged in the institution" is questioned (McKinney 36). Here, McKinney identifies writing centers as simultaneously embracing the assumption that they rest on the margins and asserting their status as not marginal. For some, "marginal means invisible" and completely deny the notion writing centers occupy this space; for others, marginal status denotes, "the writing center grand narrative is resistance," and celebrate the scholarship and practices this space can produce (39-40). Others, still, believe "writing centers were once marginal or have the possibility to be marginal now, but oh, how things have changed"—meaning, centers are becoming more and more central to the institution they serve as they evolve and achieve legitimacy (41). Ultimately, McKinney asks us to leave this debate behind; or, at the very least, explore others as well: "If we put aside our rhetorical and visual habits that have us continually wrapped in discussing and seeing ourselves as marginal or not marginal, we might see other perfectly viable, perhaps even more useful representation" (56).

As this narrative of what a writing center even is continues to be interrogated, we see scholarship and practical implementations that broaden the center's purpose. Muriel Harris, the former director of the Writing Lab at Purdue, defines writing centers as a tutoring space "part of a writing program or learning center and serve[s] the entire school, both at the secondary and college levels" (Harris, "The Concept"). She defines six integral functions that a writing center provides:

"1. Tutorials in a one-to-one setting

2. Tutors are coaches and collaborators, not teachers

3. Each student's individual needs are the focus of the tutorial

4. Experimentation and practice are encouraged

5. Writers work on writing from a variety of courses

6. Writing centers are available for students at all levels of writing proficiency" (Harris, "The Concept").

Most writing centers do operate under these tenets; they are the "truth" of the writing center master narrative that McKinney interrogates; however, as modes of composition have changed, so have our ideas of the center, its naming, and its purpose.

Michael Pemberton, in his 2003 article "Planning for Hypertexts in the Writing Center… Or Not" notes this penchant for adaptation, saying, "Writing centers have always wanted to be responsive to technology and the changes technology brings to the student populations they serve, but they also question whether the seductions of technology will end up diluting their core values or giving them responsibilities that they're not prepared to accept" (13). Pemberton's discussion of "responsibilities they're not prepared to accept" has to do with the introduction of new texts into the writing center, often digital, that incorporate different modes of composition into their creation. As time has shown, new texts are coming to the writing center as students are increasingly assigned multimodal projects intertwining visual and written rhetoric. Pemberton, here, hints at the development of something most scholars call multiliteracy centers.

John Trimbur notes in his 2000 article "Multiliteracies, Social Futures, and Writing Centers," that this term Pemberton hints at, "multiliteracy centers," will likely become the most widely adopted term as centers continue to "become more rhetorical in paying attention to the practices and effects of design in written and visual communication" (30). This is significant because, as Trimbur states, "you can tell quite a bit from the names writing centers give themselves — 'lab,' 'clinic,' 'center,' 'place,' 'studio,' 'workshop'" (29). These terms formulate identities and preconceived notions of what the space does, what the space is, and what practices the space prioritizes.

Twelve years after Trimbur's article, six prominent writing center administrators and faculty

published "The Idea of a Multiliteracy Center: Six Responses." Throughout this article, each author weighs the issue of rebranding the writing center as a "multiliteracy center." Some have taken the plunge, others are in transition, and others are still debating the affordances and constraints attached to this transition. In this response, David M. Sheridan characterizes the field's resistance to his "brazen disregard for disciplinary boundaries," noting that many people saw his work with multiliteracy centers as "transgressing long-established divides between visual and written communication" In fact, in one instance, he was confronted at a conference by an attendee who warned that "Writing centers . . . should stick to writing." Regardless, while members of the field are resistant, digital writing studios and multiliteracy centers are appearing across campuses.

Many also assert that a writing center is a space that can confront identity and identity politics. Several questions have arisen from the consideration of individual subjectivity in the writing center: questions revolving around the roles of a writing center and what they require; questions involving race, gender, class, education, age, ability, sexuality, language, geography; questions involving power dynamics in the center; and more.

Harry Denny's *Facing the Center: Toward and Identity Politics of One-to-One Mentoring* confronts the "faces" of the center through the lens of identity, especially race and ethnicity, class, sex and gender, and nationality. Denny argues that "identity politics are real and uncharted in writing centers" and are pervasive in academic institutions everywhere (4). Therefore, through a sociological and compositional lens, Denny posits writing centers as "sites par excellence where these issues are worked through in ways that wider composition studies and teaching across the discipline can learn from" (6). As a result, through these various intersections of identity, Denny notes that "Writing centers . . . could be sites for activism: organic, sustainable, even broader change could be had there" while noting that "such labor results in shifts that are tremendously local, plodding, and at times, fleeting" (36).

Race and the center has been interrogated in edited collections like the book *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call For Substantial Dialogue and Change.* One essay, Vershawn Ashanti Young's "Should Writers Use They Own English" utilizes Black Vernacular English (BVE), a rhetorical choice that shows BVE's use as a valid academic language. In doing this, Young asks composition pedagogues to, "stop using one prescriptive, foot-long ruler to measure the language of peeps who use a yardstick when they communicate" (65). Young goes on to explain that speakers of BVE, in order to be taken seriously, are forced to suppress the most expressive parts of their language. Young claims that expanding the definition of effective writing is the only way to combat this oppression of nonstandard dialects.

As social justice, critical race, and decolonial theories have entered into writing center studies, some scholars, like Romeo García, have noticed an unfortunate "white/black race paradigm" that has created a "failure to name students of color who are not black, to address their conditions and experiences, and to discuss their needs as an essential aspect in writing center practices and theories" (32). In critiquing this paradigm, García states that "If we are going to talk about and attend to race in writing centers, wither in the historical or contemporary sense, Mexican Americans cannot be absent," calling for a greater intersectional critique of our centers overall (47).

Encompassing this entire conversation is question of labor. As scholars interrogate what a writing center is, we are also asking what they do and what labor is involved. In this conversation, the topic most relevant to tutors exists around the notion of emotional labor. Arlie Hochschild defines emotional labor as a tool that "requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (Hochschild, *The Managed Heart* 7). Most narratives of emotional labor in the center have shown that "the work of managing emotions is frequently regarded as part of the worker's personalities" and often is not trained for, discussed in job descriptions, or otherwise considered (Mannon 2017). As the field

becomes more aware of burnout, compassion fatigue, and the extent to which tutors are required to perform emotional labor, this has become another key research topic.

Some argue that emotions and the subsequent performance of emotional labor should not be engaged in the center. For example, Tracy Hudson writes in a 2001 *Writing Lab Newsletter* article that "By playing the role of the counselor, the tutor defeats the purpose of the session and essentially sets the tone for the present, and possibly future, tutor/tutee relationship" (11). Hudson argues that if the tutor makes emotions the focus of the tutorial rather than the essay, the current session and those following will take on a precedent that focuses on the individual rather than the writing. She goes on to say that these emotions, then, must be anticipated by the tutor in order to be deflected and avoided.

Other scholars, though, like Melissa Weintraub—who has a background in social work—note that "It might seem surprising to consider that we use social work, or therapy skills in the course of our work with writing center students. No, we don't practice therapy (I hope!) with students, but there is a significant overlap in the ways in which we draw information from students, help them to find their own solutions, and maintain boundaries, with some of the ethical dilemma facing us" (10). Here, not only does Weintraub note that emotions are a natural component of writing center sessions, but also discusses the tutor's role in shelving their own emotions in order to draw information from writers.

Finally, writing centers have increasingly been asked to answer a call for better empirical research and research methodologies. Writing center research has often been categorized as "lore," a term popularized by Stephen North's *The Making of Knowledge in Composition.* Lore constitutes a research based on story and shared experience, "the accumulated body of traditions, practices, and beliefs about what has worked, is working, or what might work" (Harris, "Writing Center" 85). Harris critiques lore in her chapter of the book *Writing Center Research: Extending the Conversation,*

saying, "Lore is, in fact, the reverse of local reflective inquiry, because anyone drawing on lore assumes that the same conditions pertain at [their] institution as did the institution of the person adding the bit of practice to the storehouse of lore" (Harris, "Writing Center" 86). Instead, a more focused call for research exists.

As a means to answer this call, Joyce Magnotto Neff Old Dominion University suggests writing centers adopt grounded theory into their research methods. Grounded theory as a method has the potential to give writing centers more credibility in their inquiry. Neff argues that grounded theory has a place in writing center research, defining it as "a 'style of doing qualitative analysis' that works especially well for 'understanding interaction processes and social change' by encouraging 'conceptual development and density' and by requiring the researcher to maintain a critical tension between empirical data and explanatory analyses" (Neff 135). Rebecca Day Babcock and Terese Thonus echo this call in their book, *Researching the Writing Center.* Here, they state, "While writing center scholars and practitioners are beginning to value empirical research, output remains scarce" (21).They maintain that "Evidence-based practice is one cross-disciplinary research tradition we believe is highly applicable to studying what goes on in writing centers, because its outcome is informed practitioner decision-making" (Babcock and Thonus 31). Therefore, in introducing grounded theory and evidence-based practice into writing center research and analysis, our studies become more credible, critical, and perhaps most importantly, replicable and sustainable.

Methods

In developing this project, I engaged in several coding methods to ensure that the research and themes that I included in this guide are accurate representations of the field's current conversations. These methods included:

1. Engaging in interviews with professionals in the field
2. Coding conference programs for themes and repeating presentations

3. Coding prominent writing center journals for themed issues and recurring articles

The topics I found to be primarily relevant to tutor experience were: the overarching narrative of the center, the transition of writing centers to multiliteracy centers, activism in the center, and the labor, especially emotional labor, that occurs in the center.

The interviews I conducted were with four writing center professionals. These interviews framed both my approach to this project, the research I selected to inform it, and also added to the nuance of the research through quoted conversations that will emerge later in this text.

The first scholar I interviewed, Dr. Jackie Grutsch McKinney, President of the International Writing Centers Association at the time of writing, has written about the master narratives surrounding writing centers in her book *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers* and notions of writing center labor in the book *The Working Lives of New Writing Center Directors.* As a prominent scholar in the field, McKinney was helped to validate the themes chosen for this project through my coding as relevant to the field and also provided me with readings pertinent to the literature review I have conducted.

The second scholar interviewed, Dr. Rory Lee, is the director of the Digital Writing Studio at Ball State and was integral in the implementation of the FSU Digital Studio. Much of his research is focused on the intersections of multimodality and composition studies, including the intersection of multimodality and writing centers.

Morgan Gross, a PhD candidate at Ball State University and, beginning in 2018, director of Loyola Marymount University's writing center, conducted her dissertation research on the role of activism in writing center work. Much of her research focused on the claims that writing centers were spaces of activism, an idea that will be explored later in this project, but critiqued the scholarship for lacking in tangible best practices.

Finally, the last conducted interview was with Amory Orchard, a Master's student in rhetoric and composition at Ball State University and the Writing Center at Ball State's social media coordinator. As social media coordinator, Orchard is attuned to the branding methods of various writing centers and has researched the labor that goes into social media promotion. As such, much of her research intersects with the labor present in writing center work as well as the ways in which we tell our story.

Prior to conducting these interviews, I also reviewed the call for papers, themes, special issues, and various recurring article topics in many of the field's prominent publications and conferences. These included: the East Central Writing Centers Association (ECWCA) conference, the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) conference, *Writing Lab Newsletter*, *Praxis*, and *WC Journal*. The span of this review involved publications and calls for papers between the years of 2014-2018 when data was available. During this review I read editors' notes, article abstracts, panel and presentation descriptions, identified themes, and more in order to get a larger sense of what the writing center community is publishing and talking about. These topics, both through my coding and identified by conversations with writing center professionals like Dr. Jackie Grutsch McKinney include: social justice, labor and writing center job descriptions, emotional labor, developments in non-U.S. centers, and questions of race and identity.

Section One: Researching Narratives

"*Writing centers are comfortable, iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-to-one tutoring on their writing*" (McKinney 3, emphasis original). This narrative permeates general and insider perceptions of what writing centers are and do. As tutors, we expect this when we are hired. As scholars, we base our work around this narrative. But, as McKinney notes, this narrative is limiting and traps us into a style of research and inquiry that does not allow us to pursue new possibility. So, what to do about this narrative?

Several of the questions we may be able to interrogate as tutors are whether or not this master narrative is still applicable to writing centers; consider shifts that may be adding to, revising, or erasing aspects of this narrative; and what other avenues other than our marginal/not-marginal status may be pursued.

As tutors consider this narrative, in order to properly conduct research into its interrogation, a research question must be posed. For example, a sample research question could be: **"What alternatives exist to the one-to-one model of tutoring, and what would these alternative practices look like?"** When posing a research question, a research methodology must be paired in tandem to ensure that the study is empirically sound. An example for a question like this could be "teacher research."

In teacher research, "the practitioner keeps a detailed log or journal of all tutoring sessions, noting practices and situations and reflecting on their effectiveness" (Babcock and Thonus 37). Using this research methodology for a frame of the study, a tutor (or, tutors) could conduct sessions using a one-to-one model, but devise and test other forms of writing consultation that have been theorized as being potentially effective. As certain strands of alternative tutoring models prove to be successful, the tutor(s) would continue this model, further journaling and collecting data on its results. These journals should involve the "circumstances and the details" of each session that would allow them to prove why they were or were not successful. As these logs are collected, the methods that have been rigorously tested over an extended period of time can be shared an expanded upon, allowing them to become canonically accepted in the field as a method(s) of alternative tutoring technique(s).

Tutors may find resistance to this form of research from administrators who may not want to disrupt the one-to-one tutoring model; therefore, a study like this will require necessary development with writing center directors in order to ensure that the center you may be working in

is comfortable with the experimentation. In addition, clients are also susceptible to this expectation of the one-to-one model. Therefore, it is paramount that tutors-as-researchers understand that the consent of directors and clients is collected before beginning your study.

Other ways tutors may contribute to this conversation and enact change on a local level is through an interrogation of their own center's identity. How does their center match the master narrative of writing centers as nurturing, or "homes?" How do they differ? As Babcock and Thonus mention in their book, *Researching the Writing Center*, "If little empirical research has been published on writing centers in general, then even less has been published on writing center location and design" (63). Some centers are perfectly poised for this research. Do you have multiple locations? Do you have a dedicated or borrowed space? How does your writing center brand itself?

Branding is an area of great potential analysis for writing centers. I spoke with Amory Orchard, a Master's student at Ball State University who studies writing centers and their overarching narratives on social media, as well as the people who maintain these accounts. In her role as social media coordinator, Amory has seen a multitude of writing centers perpetuate the narrative that McKinney outlines: sometimes out of necessity in order to validate their existence, and other times through a lack of critical reflection: "Reflection is so important," Amory says (Orchard). "Something that I've been talking to [the new graduate administrators in the center] about as they enter their new roles is to look out for these narratives" (Orchard).

Amory makes a good point when considering this topic of research too, stating:

> As somebody who keeps going to conferences and is aware of different institutional contexts, that's something I'm very aware of. So as I'm writing my stuff, I don't want to be like, "We *should* be doing all these writing as process literacy campaigns" because maybe people want to and they don't have the funding. So what I'm trying to do with my research

> is show the benefits of it but also say because so many writing centers are doing it, if we're going to do it we need to be purposeful. (Orchard)

Being aware of these differing institutional contexts and avoiding generalizations will only lead to more inclusive scholarly research.

Another example of research in this aspect of writing center studies involves Amory's own research. Currently, Amory is developing a research proposal in which she will do:

> a visual or content analysis for Instagram: so, how are writing centers telling their visual story? And, their captions are going to be something I look at too. They refer to themselves as families a lot, and for a lot of people, a home isn't a safe place. So it would be interesting to see maybe who is posting those? I don't know what that would look like. (Orchard)

Here, Amory has identified an avenue for research, a research method, and a research question. She is also demonstrating a comfort with the unknown—she may not know exactly what she's going to discover, but she's willing to do the research and find the answers.

Questioning the writing center master narrative is an important field of inquiry that will only add nuance to our spaces and our histories. As we continue to develop these questions surrounding the design of our centers, our status in the institution of academia, and the metaphors we give ourselves (i.e., families, homes), remaining cognizant and reflective of the narrative this creates is essential.

Section 2: Naming and Purpose

The term "writing center" is a term that has been (nearly) universally adopted by campus resources that fit into McKinney's identified narrative. However, as John Trimbur has noted, other terms have been used; with each of these terms, inversions of this narrative are created in an attempt to perhaps broaden, redefine, or challenge what writing centers are known to do. One such term is "multiliteracy center."

The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors, a tutor training guide that most tutors are introduced to in the beginning stages of their writing center experience, discusses the hats tutors wear. These hats include: the ally, the coach, the commentator, the collaborator, the writing expert, the learner, and the counselor (Ryan and Zimmerelli 5-8). However, as writing centers adapt into spaces that embrace multimodal composition, tutors' hats and expectations also change and adapt.

Multiliteracy centers and digital studios are a relatively new area of study in writing center research. I spoke with Rory Lee, a professor of English and Ball State University and director of the Digital Writing Studio at Ball State, about digital studios. One of the only book-length texts that he could think of in multiliteracy center research was David Sheridan and James Inman's edited collection, *Multiliteracy Centers*. Sheridan and Inman's text encompasses topics like the design of a multiliteracy center, the consultations that take place in these spaces, their application to the larger academic community, and more; but, again, there is very little tutor voice considered in these essays.

In addition, my conversations with Lee indicate the need for research like this. Lee mentioned that the discussion of multiliteracy centers can be difficult. Currently, there is a dichotomy between multiliteracy centers as one full, shared space, and the existence of a writing center in one space and digital studio in another. Rory believes that "the natural progression is to go to a shared space. On one hand because space is such a commodity. Your space is limited in the humanities, so it makes sense to me that you would start to transition into those sorts of dual spaces. Now, what do those look like?" (Lee). Rory specifically defines a constraint in this interrogative as the design of the space. In addition, he worries about their naming. So, as writing centers continue to develop in order to support the work of multiliteracy centers and satellite sites like digital studios, being aware of this design and need for space is integral.

As we consider this merging and the adaptation of our spaces, then, I posit another potential research questions for tutors who are involved with or exposed to digital studios and multiliteracy

centers: **Does the name "multiliteracy center" change the perception of the center? If so, in what ways does this perception shift? And is the term "multiliteracy" even accessible to outsiders of the field?**

> This is a question Rory is attempting to understand, too. He told me that:
>
> writing centers—which is the kind of name name, I mean, you see writing studios and labs—center has kind of become the preferred term for good reason. So do you want to abandon the sort of goodwill that you've built with that name if you go to a different sort of name? You would think that the term multiliteracy would try to be encompassing. But that makes sense to us because that term encompasses and is a catch-all for everything we think we're doing. But does multiliteracy interface well with the general public? So the naming is a big part of it. (Lee)

So, in order to begin an evidence-based inquiry into the naming and creation of multiliteracy centers, I would recommend tutors attempt a qualitative, ethnographic approach. Qualitative research is defined as "observation, interview, and collection of documents" (Babcock and Thonus 36). Ethnography, then, is a more slippery form of research that is practiced in a variety of ways; however, the most general definition is "typically involving *participant observation* or *immersion*" (Babcock and Thonus 39, emphasis original).

During this qualitative study, tutors would be able to study, observe, and interview writing center tutors and digital studio tutors. The tutor could also interview clients in each space. When compiling this data, the researcher would be able to "code" and interpret their findings, looking for common threads and themes. For example, what common thoughts and ideas do tutors express? How is the act of tutoring talked about similarly and differently in each space, if at all? Do clients express different experiences if they have been tutored in both spaces? Similarly, if the tutor themselves has occupied consultant roles in both spaces, an auto-ethnography could also be

appropriate; in this approach, the tutor would use an ethnographic approach, but turn this inquiry inward, instead interrogating personal experience. Autoethnographic data is contrasted with "anecdotal" data because autoethnography is meticulously recorded in the moment of experience, whereas anecdotes are "personal experiences… remembered…" and influenced by "memory and desire" (Babcock and Thonus 32).

To ensure that this data does not solely represent one university or institution's center, this research would do well as a collaborative project, comparing and contrasting findings with other tutors' data. In this form of cross-institutional study, tutors will be able to share more reliable data; however, in the simple act of recording and publishing the data from your own center, tutors conducting similar studies have access to this data. Therefore, if you do not have the resources or connections possible to create a study that encompasses several institutions, value may still be found in the data that is collected; especially considering that multiliteracy centers are such a new frontier.

One thing Rory was clear about was the need for research in this area of writing center studies. He told me that specifically:

> I think there's a lot of opportunity for empirical research and for mixed methods stuff. So like, you know, studies that include interviews and case studies and surveys, you know, we can do a lot of that. I think we need a lot of information and data collection. Who's coming to us? What are they working on? What are their needs? Are they satisfied? What are the programs that clients are coming and using? What are the genres they're working in? What sort of literacy help do they find themselves asking for more often than not? Does what they think they're coming to get help on actually match their needs? So we can duplicate a lot of stuff from writing center research. I think there's a sense of what do these spaces potentially do for the curriculum, too. . . . One that should probably be done is really about promotion

> and retention. So, like, how do we get people in these spaces? I mean, that's clearly a problem we're having. (Lee)

Therefore, tutors with access to these spaces in their centers and institutions should definitely consider multiliteracy centers as avenues for research. With a variety of methods that apply to this inquiry, the objective need for this research, and the accessibility of these questions to new researchers, undergraduates with interest in research will find a rich experience with multiliteracy research.

Section 3: Identity and Activism

Identity and activism are becoming two of the most researched topics in writing center studies. After talking with Jackie Grutsch McKinney and Morgan Gross, doctoral candidate and Assistant Director of the Writing Center at Ball State, I noticed both had named social justice theory as one of the most popular writing center topics. In our interview, Morgan stated that she sees:

> "People say [that writing centers are a space for activism] a lot, and I believe it—like, it's a convincing argument, and I believe the people who write about it also believe it—but why do we keep writing about it as a way to say 'This is what can and should happen'? Because it's not really all the time what is happening. So I think now we're seeing more empirical studies that try to say, 'Here's either how it's happening,' or how it's not and why, and what to do differently." (Gross)

While Morgan warns that oftentimes tutors are not as socially aware as the scholarship may give them credit for, these empirical studies Morgan notes are where tutors can become vital voices in this conversation.

As Harry Denny states, writing centers are uniquely positioned to be centers of activism; Gross agrees, discussing writing centers as "contact zones," inherently breeding situations in which identity and power dynamics are central to the situation at hand. While Gross and Vershawn Ashanti

Young would also agree that one of the primary areas of research in writing centers currently interrogates binary notions of Black/white and language discrimination, there are clearly more avenues for identity and activism in writing centers—something García notes. Therefore, what questions can be confronted in the research of "difference," as Babcock and Thonus state?

In order to better understand the populations and subjectivities that demand attention in writing center scholarship, writing tutors could begin with this research question: **Who is left out of writing center research when we talk about identity, power, contact zones, tutoring pedagogy, and more?** When engaging in this research, tutors could conduct a qualitative study on a corpus of existing research regarding tutoring and "difference," identity, or social activism in the writing center. When reviewing these texts, tutors would code this existing research, looking for patterns in who is represented in this research, engaging in what scholars call a "discourse analysis." This sort of research involves "the researcher read[ing] and analy[zing] the discourse as text, looking for patterns and explanations of the meanings and ways communication is taking place" (Babcock and Thonus 46). When applying discourse analysis to an existing body of texts, a clear textual analysis of a discipline can be found, confidently asserting gaps in the research and creating a call to action. Once these gaps are identified, additional avenues for writing center research are subsequently identified too.

Because some tutors may not be as socially aware of concepts like privilege, power, and difference, one of the most important things to consider when doing research that includes identity and subjectivity is the notion of Othering. The Other and Othering is a topic of inquiry found throughout disciplines in the humanities and social sciences that expressly discusses the subjectivity and experiences of marginalized folks; i.e., the Other is the marginalized, the one that is considered "different" from the hegemonic norm (Denny 3). When these identities are trivialized, treated in reductive ways, or subjected to macro-/microaggressions, Othering occurs. Therefore, Denny warns

that this research can often result in treating groups as "objects of inquiry," placing marginalized people in situations where "'we' can learn from 'them,' 'they' from 'us'" (Denny 5).

Perhaps the best way to avoid this is understanding the importance of intersectionality. Intersectionality is a term first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Acting Professor of Law at the University of California, Los Angeles Law School, in 1989. Crenshaw explored several cases involving Black women in a court of law. During this analysis, Crenshaw discovered that these women were subject to "double discrimination," stating that "Black women can experience discrimination in any number of ways," going on to say that "Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination" (149). Thus, through Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, Black women experience discrimination not just as a "sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women" (149). In other words, any or all markers of our identity influence the ways in which we experience the world, benefit from privilege or do not—they operate simultaneously and holistically.

Audre Lorde, author of the essay "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," continues to explore the ways that identities operate through the lens of privilege and intersectionality. Here, Lorde the "mythical norm." a concept she states is comprised of markers of identity that result in a total absence of marginalization; or, as Lorde describes it, "that [which] is not me" (116). The markers she identifies are "white, thin, male, young, heter0sexual, christian, and financially secure" (Lorde 116). These markers, and many more such as ability and size, define whether or not we receive certain privileges, or live on the margins as Other. Therefore, in understanding the concept of intersectionality and accounting for total, lived experience in the writing center—whether through labor practices or the act of tutoring—better, more inclusive research can be published.

Morgan concluded our conversation by sharing some of the major findings and recommendations from her dissertation research. She said that, "I think that like—not 100%, but by and large—we've made the case that writing centers can and should do social justice work. Now we just need more information and ideas about how to do it realistically, how to get tutors on board with doing it, how to get them over that barrier of like, being married to niceness in their sessions and having them move into the braver spaces" (Gross). These braver spaces, the contact zones where social justice work may be confronted, are where tutors must move if change is to be implemented, if tangible, acceptable research and inquiry is to be conducted. Identity, privilege, systemic power, and the center are all heavily intertwined—after all, as Morgan says, writing centers can be integral in "identity formation," or "shaping a person's identity" (Gross). Therefore, as writing centers continue to evolve and change their grand narrative, social justice must remain a central part of their story.

Section 4: Labor, Especially Emotional Labor

Arlie Hochschild, author and psychologist, defines emotional labor as a practice that "requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (Hochschild, *The Managed Heart* 7). Emotional labor differs from emotions. Emotional labor is "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value" (7); emotions, however, are a "bodily cooperation with an image, a thought, a memory—a cooperation of which the individual is aware" (Hochschild, "Emotion Work" 551). Tutors are required to perform emotional labor in their jobs almost every day, just like any other position: as she writes in her book, *The Managed Heart,* Hochschild states "Emotional labor is potentially good. No customer wants to deal with a surly waitress, a crabby bank clerk, or a flight attendant who avoids eye contact in order to avoid getting a request" (9).

This labor, however, can become rather imposing for tutors in writing centers; crafting a publicly observable face in situations that are not conducive to this can exhaust tutors and cause burnout. Therefore, as labor becomes an increasingly popular topic in writing center studies, one potential research question could be: **Is the practice of emotional labor in the writing center causing tutor burnout?** Currently, much of the lore suggests that it is; however, empirical studies can give credence to this lore.

A possible method of inquiry for this research question would be action research. Action research is defined as "data-driven," and in a writing center context, able to "involve tutors, tutees, faculty, and administrators working together to solve a mutually recognized problem" (Babcock and Thonus 39). These agents are a part of the research process throughout the project, and in this instance, could involve regular surveys and interviews to understand tutors' emotional well-being in an environment that requires emotional performativity. Questions in this survey could include "How many sessions a week do you perform emotional labor?" with ranges of percentages, or "How strong is the impact of performing emotional labor on your emotional well-being?" with answers ranging from not at all impactful to very impactful. Optional follow-up interviews may then offer nuance and insight on the data collected.

Amory has several theories why this conversation is so relevant to writing center work. For example, she says that it may be because of "the documents that we write—we're complicit in that emotional labor. Sometimes we have to play by the rules and the expectations. But we also have to go back to the reflective practice and see how we're being complicit" (Orchard). Here, Amory specifically discussed the ways writing centers posit themselves as places of customer service. While she acknowledges that sometimes this narrative is beneficial because "Sometimes that's the approach that maybe gets us funding to be a writing center in the first place, to keep the doors open," she also worries that this is perpetuating an expectation of emotional labor that we aren't training our staff

for (Orchard). As such, perhaps the most pertinent theory Amory has for the exigence of this conversation stems from the notion that "As we're getting more reflective about our work and thinking about our jobs as more than just tutoring, we focus on other things, on ourselves" (Orchard).

As we move forward, self-care and reflective practices must continue to inform our work in order to avoid burnout and potentially hostile work environments. Through the continued review of our tutor training texts, an examination of our narrative, and the expectations we place on our staff, workplace hazards like emotional labor and burnout should be in this conversation. For now, though, perhaps most necessary is understanding the exact ways that this labor affects our staff, the ways in which we see it manifest. With labor practices in writing centers becoming one of the newest emerging areas of inquiry, one thing is clear: the research potential is rich and necessary.

Conclusion

As tutors in a writing center, undergraduates are perfectly poised to begin their own foray into writing center research and inquiry. As I have conducted my own research, done my own literature review, and presented at regional and national conferences in the discipline, I have felt nothing but welcomed by fellow scholars. While situated as newcomers to the field, ensuring that we have a voice in the literature and documents that directly concern our practices is integral. As the implementers of the theories and practices that are published, we have a unique opportunity to critique what does and does not work across wide institutional contexts.

Research can be daunting, but support exists in fellow tutors, clients, and administrators. And, if support is not found there, online communities and print texts exist for support and guidance. It is my hope that this document has given you a sincere, earnest, and comprehensive look into the potential writing centers have for research. While additional research methods absolutely exist, other integral, must-read texts are out there, and other considerations outside of what has been

directly included in this text exist, an understanding of the literature included and methods identified right here in these pages should be allow for a strong base for research worth sharing, presenting, and even publishing.

Our job descriptions may only indicate that tutors are one-to-one peer mentors who review essays and other documents, but as text shows, our roles are much more than that. We navigate contact zones, perform emotional labor, contribute to institutional narratives, and provide guidance in genres that go far beyond the alphabetic. Understanding the knowledge and value we have in this position opens so many doors. It is my hope that this text has inspired and encouraged you to at the very least test the doorknob and take a peek at what's behind it.

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Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
2000 University Avenue
Muncie, IN 47306-0155
Phone: 765-285-5070

DATE:	March 9, 2018
TO:	Noah Patterson
FROM:	Ball State University IRB
RE:	IRB protocol # 1207763-1
TITLE:	Works Cited: Adapting Undergraduate Writing Center Experience to Writing Center Scholarship
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	**DETERMINATION OF NOT HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH**
DECISION DATE:	March 9, 2018
REVIEW TYPE:	Administrative Review

The Institutional Review Board received the above protocol. After review and consideration, the IRB concluded that this project does not meet the definition of 'research with human subjects' at this time, as specified by federal regulations at 45 CFR 46.

> **Research:** A systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge.
> *(Activities which meet this definition constitute research for purposes of this policy, whether or not they are conducted or supported under a program which is considered research for other purposes.)*
> **Human Subject:** A living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains: (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual or (2) identifiable private information.

Consequently, this project does not require IRB approval as submitted. The IRB accepts this information for our records and will retain it in our files. Thank you for providing the IRB with these materials for review. Please contact the Office of Research Integrity if any details of the study are to change so that the IRB may reconsider the protocol, if necessary.

If you have any questions regarding this decision or would like to respond in person, please contact the Office of Research Integrity.

D. Clark Dickin, PhD/Chair
Institutional Review Board

Christopher Mangelli, JD, MS, MEd, CIP/
Director
Office of Research Integrity